REMARKS

Claims 1-18, 20-21, and 27-37 were pending in the application at the time the present Office Action was mailed. Claim 1 is amended by this response. No claims are cancelled in this response. Accordingly, claims 1-18, 20-21, and 27-37 remain pending.

The applicants' representative would like to thank the Examiner for his consideration during a telephone interview completed on March 31, 2005. During that telephone interview, the applicants' representative and the Examiner discussed differences between pending claim 1 and U.S. Patent No. 6,463,461 ("Hanson"). Further details relating to the discussion are provided below. Should the Examiner require additional details relating to the interview, the applicants' representative encourages the Examiner to contact the undersigned.

The Office Action rejected claims 1-18, 20-21, and 27-37 as being unpatentable. Specifically, the status of the claims in light of the Office Action is as follows:

(A) Claims 1-15, 18, 20-21, 27-33, and 36-37 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being unpatentable over Hanson.

(B) Claims 16-17 and 34-35 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Hanson in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,101,480 ("Conmy").

A. Hanson Reference

Hanson teaches a technique for "communicating information among a group of participants." (Hanson, title.) In this technique, electronic media for communicating information, which is referred to in Hanson as a "zaplet" (Hanson, 4:25-28) is stored in a database in a server. (Hanson, 4:38-39.) The server is "configured to manage the dynamic content, routing, and updating of electronic forms, messages, or zaplets among the participants." (Hanson, 6:6-8.) The "server" referred to in various discussions in Hanson comprises multiple conventional components, such as an electronic mail server,

web server, database server, and so forth. (Hanson, Figure 2 and accompanying discussion beginning at 6:45.)

In Hanson's technique, the "web application server 14 is responsible for executing business logic associated with the electronic forms, messages, and zaplets. For example, the web application server 14 may manage message, form, and zaplet manipulation, ... and participant interaction with various zaplets, forms, and messages." (Hanson, 6:65-7:6.)

Hanson's technique employs email and non-email components to enable collaboration. (Hanson, 9:21-59 and 10:1-18.) In Hanson's technique a collaborative message is an electronic mail ("email") message with an embedded web form. (See, e.g., Hanson, 9:5-67.) Various functions of Hanson's technique are provided by using a web server and an email server. (See, e.g., Hanson, 11:12-43.) For example, to begin a collaboration, a participant requests a web form from a web server, completes fields in the web form, and submits the web form to the web server. (Hanson, 11:12-22.) The technique then utilizes an email server to send email to the participants with an indication of the collaboration message. (Hanson, 11:32-35.) When a recipient opens the email message, the web content is served by a web server and displayed to the recipient. (Hanson, 11:40-65.) To update the collaboration (e.g., to respond to a collaboration message), the recipient adds information to the web form and submits the web form to the web server. (See Hanson, 2:4-24.)

Thus, in Hanson's technique, users interact with web servers to create and manipulate collaborative messages and the web server interacts with a mail server to send notifications.

B. Conmy Reference

Conmy teaches a technique for providing electronic calendars and scheduling. The technique provides "[a] system for scheduling time intervals for a plurality of users on a

network [and] comprises a database system that stores a profile for each potential invitee of the system at one or more servers. . . . The system further comprises request generators located remotely from the servers." (Conmy, Abstract.)

C. Applicants' Technology

The applicants' technology is directed to a collaborative email system in which collaborative electronic mail messages are fully integrated into conventional electronic mail systems. For example, "each time a user creates a new collaborative email message, views a collaborative email message, responds to a collaborative email message, etc., the user selects the actions to be taken by interacting with his or her email system." (Applicants' specification, 12:2-5; emphasis added.) Futhermore, "[e]mail component 148, in managing electronic mail for the user, also manages collaborative email messages." (Applicants' specification, 13:14-15.)

When creating a collaborative email message, a user interacts with an email client application. (See, e.g., applicants' Figure 4 and accompanying description in applicants' specification beginning at 14:20.) Specifically, when creating a new collaborative email message, "the author of the message could select a 'new collaborative email' option of his or her email program." (Applicants' specification, 15:5-6.)

An author sends a collaborative email message, e.g., by selecting a "Send" option in the email client application, which causes the email client application to send the collaborative email message to an email server. (Applicants' specification, 21:11-17.)

The author may indicate various actions relating to the collaborative email message, such as encrypting, marking as special, etc. "Any such actions taken by the author are identified in the collaborative email message and may be enforced by the email servers or the clients." (Applicants' specification, 22:6-8.)

Collaborative messages are also integrated into the recipient's email client application. As an example, "displaying a received collaborative email message is

integrated into the user's electronic mail system." (Applicants' specification, 28:16-18.) As another example, the email client application displays various options that are specific to collaborative email messages, such as the following: "add my comments," "blind forwarding," "forward with read only," and "forward with modify." (See applicants' specification, 29:7-30:5.")

After the recipient takes collaborative steps, such as by adding comments, the recipient sends the message. (Applicants specification, 32:17-21.) "[I]nvoking the [send] option causes the collaborative email message to be modified and an indication of the newly modified collaborative email message communicated to each email server that is associated with one of the recipients." (Applicants specification, 32:21-25.)

In various embodiments of the applicants' technology, "email servers are... responsible for managing collaborative email messages." (Applicants' specification, 34:21-22.) Moreover, "collaborative email messages are integrated into the servers along with more traditional email messages, and a recipient of a collaborative email message is typically able to respond to the collaborative email message." (Applicants' specification, 35:4-7.)

Thus, in the applicants' technique, users interact with an email system to create and manipulate collaborative email messages. (See also applicants' Figure 9 and its accompanying text beginning at 36:7.)

D. Analysis

Several elements of rejected independent claims 1 and 27 do not appear in the applied references. As an example, Hanson neither teaches nor suggests using conventional email commands to manipulate collaborative email messages. In Hanson's technique, a web form is submitted to a web server to initiate a collaboration or to respond to a collaboration message. In contrast, when using the applicants' technology, a user interacts directly with the email system just as the user would do with conventional email

messages. As an example, a user could select a Send option of an email client application to respond to an incoming collaborative message. If a user performed a similar action in Hanson's technique, a conventional email system would handle the message and would be unable to perform any special collaboration-related behavior relating to the message, unlike the applicants' technology, which would perform an appropriate action based on the received command.

As described in the applicants' specification, "[b]y integrating the creation of collaborative email messages with the author's email system, the collaborative email messages can take advantage of many (if not all) of the features of the email system." (Applicants' specification, 16:10-12.) Examples of such features in relation to an email client application are features that users are accustomed to using with the email client application including, e.g., formatting, spelling, grammar checking, recalling a message, etc. These features are integrated into email client applications and servers, such as MICROSOFT OUTLOOK and MICROSOFT EXCHANGE. These applications are owned by the assignee of the instant application.

Other benefits of integrating these features into an email system include scalability and reduced deployment costs. MICROSOFT EXCHANGE is highly scalable and easily deployable. This product is used in organizations having thousands of email users. In contrast, Hanson's technique requires deployment of several services (e.g., web server, database server, and so on) to support collaboration messages.

Because the applied references neither teach nor suggest employing an email system to handle collaborative email messages, the applicants believe that the claims are allowable. As an example, claim 1 recites "accepting commands, made available by an electronic mail program for manipulating electronic mail messages that are not collaborative electronic mail messages, to manipulate the collaborative electronic mail message." Claim 27 similarly recites "allowing the plurality of user-selectable options to also control collaborative electronic mail messages." Because these features are neither

taught nor suggested by the applied references, the applicants' independent claims cannot be rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) or 35 U.S.C. § 103(a). Because the dependent claims import the limitations from the claims on which they depend, they also cannot be rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) or 35 U.S.C. § 103(a). Moreover, the claims recite a novel combination of elements that is neither taught nor suggested by the applied references. Applicants have nevertheless amended claim 1 to clarify these aspects of their technology.

Based on the above amendments and remarks, applicants respectfully request reconsideration of this application and its early allowance. If the Examiner has any questions or believes a telephone conference would expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is encouraged to call the undersigned at (206) 359-6478.

Respectfully submitted,
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Date: April 11, 2005

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